

## ***Passing: The Conclusion***

For the last couple of days we have discussed the conclusion to Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*. We know for sure that Clare dies. However, it's not clear *how* she dies. I've argued that if we want to think hard about the meaning of *Passing*, we need to consider what happens at the end of the novel and why Larsen might have chosen to end the story that way. We've done some of that thinking in class. Now it's time to put your best thinking into writing.

Write an essay in which you answer the following two questions:

*What happens to Clare at the end of the novel?*

*What effect does the author's choice to end the book this way have on the story's meaning?*

In your essay you should:

- Write an introduction that engages the interest of an informed reader who seeks further insight into the book. The best way to do this is to set up your thesis—what *you* say—as a response to other points of view on the topic—what *they* say.
  - Introduce the topic you're writing about.
  - Describe other ways of looking at the topic.
  - State your interpretation of the topic—your thesis.
- Provide reasons and evidence from the text to argue why your interpretation is the best account of what happens to Clare at the end of the novel.
  - The evidence does not *need* to be a quotation. You can also paraphrase events and mention relevant details. Just be sure to provide a page number where an interested reader could find the details you cited.
- Plant a naysayer in your essay. In other words, point out that other people might disagree with your interpretation and respond to their points.
  - Here's a template you could use to help: "Although some readers may object that \_\_\_\_\_, I would reply that \_\_\_\_\_."
  - Instead of completely refuting the counterargument, you could agree with part of it while challenging the part you dispute. In other words, you can say "yes, but" or "yes and no."
    - Useful templates for making concessions while still standing your ground:
      - "Although I grant that \_\_\_\_\_, I still maintain that \_\_\_\_\_"
      - "While it is true that \_\_\_\_\_, I disagree that \_\_\_\_\_"
      - "On the one hand I agree that \_\_\_\_\_. But on the other hand, I still insist that \_\_\_\_\_."

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

- Discuss the implications of the author's choice to end the novel this way. That is, what does this ending seem to suggest about the *meaning* of the story?
  - Keep in mind what this novel is about. To this point, we've read about two African-American women living in New York in the 1920s. Both of them can "pass" as white, but they treat "passing" very differently. Irene seems to maintain that "passing" is disloyal to one's race, yet she admits that she "passes" for the sake of convenience. Clare, on the other hand, has been fully "passing" for over a decade—and it's worth thinking about why—but in the novel we see her wanting to return to the African-American community. Given all of that, what might be the point of the author choosing to have Clare die at the end of the story, and in the way that you are arguing it has happened?